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INELUCTABLE ULYSSES

A Glossarium

John T. Hamilton

31. *Ulysses* is a fat book of more than two hundred and sixty thousand words; it is a rich book with a vocabulary of about thirty thousand words. Discuss some of them.

Joyce's *Ulysses* is a verbal feast, a book "fat" and "rich" that tirelessly luxuriates in words, words that are beside each other and words that follow each other, *nebeneinander* and *nacheinander*, ineluctably.

The third chapter of the novel's first part, whose thematic terms I have already begun to evoke, exemplifies this festive quality. The text is redolent with lexical luxury, not unlike Leopold Bloom's breakfast of organ meats, served up in the subsequent chapter, which "gave to his palate a fine tang of faintly scented urine." In chapter 1.3, on which I would like concentrate, the odors come exclusively from the sea, as Stephen Dedalus makes his lazy jaunt across Sandymount strand.

The chapter is dubbed "Proteus" in the scheme that the author—sincerely or deceptively—supplied to his friend, Frank Budgen, in Zürich. According to Budgen, Joyce confessed that this was his favorite chapter: "It's my own preference. You understand that this is the opening of the book?" ... "It's the struggle with Proteus. Change is the theme. Everything changes—sea, sky, man, animals. The words change, too."

Proteus, from the adjective *prōtos* "first," is appropriate enough for any "opening," yet the name itself, including the form *protean*, fails to appear either in this chapter or in the rest of the novel. Primal or elemental Proteus remains transcendent, outside the frame. If in the beginning was the Word, this word comes before the beginning.

Discernible is an allusion to Menelaus' speech to Telemachus on the sandy shores of Egyptian Pharos, reported in Book 4 of Homer's *Odyssey*. Should Menelaus struggle with Proteus and manage to pin him down, this god of constant change and evasion would reveal the truth of the Achaeans' fate.

As Joyce's chapter struggles with Proteus, so readers struggle with the text's lexical richness: with striking portmanteaux (*snotgreen*, *seawrack*, *contransmagnific-andjewbangtentiality*), archaisms (*sconce*, *tainst of his sept*), foreign terms (*diaphane*, *frate porcospino*, *Frauenzimmer*, *mou en civet*, *piuttosto*), and onomatopoetic inventions (*seesoo*, *hrss*, *rsseeiss*, *oos*). Struggle is inevitable; yet few would lament being thus caught up with these delicious offerings of sense and sensation, locked into the intricacies of the written sign and the resonances of the phonic. Few would extricate themselves from these morsels of sight and sound, which together constitute, as the chapter's opening expresses it, the "ineluctable modality of the visible" and the "ineluctable modality of the audible." The graphemes that sit still on the page (*nebeneinander*) and the phonemes that ring out successively (*nacheinander*) seduce and never let go.

Ineluctable modality of the visible: at least that if no more, thought through my eyes. Signatures of all things I am here to read, seaspawn and seawrack, the nearing tide, that rusty boot. Snotgreen, bluesilver, rust: coloured signs. Limits of the diaphane.

The opening phrase, despite its blatant Latinity ("ineluctable modality of the visible"), clearly gestures toward Greek philosophy, in particular Aristotle's classic work on sense and perception, *De anima*, which Joyce consulted day and night—in Barthélemy-Saint-Hilaire's translation—at the Bibliothèque Nationale and the Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève in Paris. (February 1903, to his brother Stanislaus: "I am feeling very intellectual these times and up to my eyes in Aristotle's Psychology.")

Stephen, too, during his stay in the French capital, was drawn to the Philosopher. In the previous chapter, as Stephen drifts away from his classroom duties: "Aristotle's phrase formed itself within the gabbled verses and floated out into the studious silence of the library of Sainte Genevieve where he had read, sheltered from the sin of Paris, night by night."

Ineluctable modality of the visible—the two outer terms share the Latin suffix *-bilis*, which denotes some capacity or appropriateness. We follow an arc from the negation of one capacity (*ineluctable*) to the positive expression of another (*visible*).

Although the conception underlying the “ineluctable modality of the visible” refers to Aristotelian psychology, this particular phrasing cannot be found in any of the Philosopher’s extant texts. Stephen appears to appropriate the concept by qualifying it as “ineluctable”—a word that occasions the reader’s first lexical struggle and, hence, a need for a selective glossary.

INELUCTABLE: The Latin *ineluctabilis* negates (*in-*) the sense of *exluctari*, “to struggle out from.” The verb of struggling or wrestling (*luctari*) is still heard in the French *lutte*; and is even discernible in *luxury*, from Latin *luxus* “dislocated, disjointed,” perhaps related to Greek *loxos* “slanted, crosswise, distorted” and *luein* “to loosen” – *luxus* (*luxury*) being the debauched excess that loosens the body and soul, hence *luxuria*, which names “sloth,” one of Catholicism’s Seven Deadly Sins.

The earliest attestation of *luxury* in English is found in the fourteenth-century moral treatise *Agenbite of Inwit*, a book whose presence is felt across *Ulysses*, expressing the “remorse of conscience” that Stephen suffers concerning his behavior at his mother’s deathbed. In *Agenbite*’s “Sixth Step of Rightfulness,” we read: “Þe dyeuel...assayleþ...þane sanguinien mid ioliuete and mid luxurie” (“The devil assails thy blood with jollity and with luxury”). Here, *luxurie* denotes sexual indulgence, the temptation that haunts Stephen Dedalus through his mid-morning jaunt along Sandymount strand. Hours later, when Leopold Bloom finds himself by the sea, the irresistible locks of the “perfectly Greek” Gerty MacDowell are singled out as “a profusion of luxuriant clusters.”

In the ineluctable modalities of the visible and the audible, the *luxury* (Italian: *lusso*) can be heard in the name *Ulysses* (Latin: *Ulixes*), as well as in the *lux* (“light”) that “shines through” in the *diaphane*, and the *lux* that Lucifer bears, rebelliously, against the “law” (*lex*).

Etymological webs: the struggle between two radicals—LUC- (“shine,” as in Greek *luchnos* [“lamp”] and *leukos* [“bright”], as in Latin *lucerna* [“lamp”], *lucidus* [“bright”], and *luna* [“moon”]) and LUG- (“distress, contortion,” as in Greek *lugros* [“mournful”] and *loigos* [“ruin, havoc”], as in Latin *lugere* [“to mourn”]).

SEASPAWN: Stephen sees what the sea leaves to see (“thought through my eyes”). That which the waters “spew” forth is what “spreads out” (Latin: *expandere*—Old French: *espandre*—English: *spawn*): the milt or spleen of a fish spilled out upon the sands. The word *spawn* shares the Latin prefix *ex-* with *exluctari*. Stephen cannot “struggle out of” what has been “poured out” before his eyes. The verb *pandere* appears to be cognate with Greek adverb *phandon* (“openly”), derived from *pephantas*, the perfect participle of *phainein* (“to shine”), heard in the Aristotelian *diaphane*.

SEAWRACK: *wrack* can refer to retributive punishment or revenge (German: *rächen*) or the wreck of a ship or that which one “sorts out” (*wracken*) as rubbish.

Stephen closed his eyes to hear his
boots crush crackling wrack and
shells.

Later in the chapter: "A bloated carcass of a dog lay lolled on bladderwrack." BLADDERWRACK is a species of seaweed (*Fucus vesiculosus*); and *bladder*, cognate with Germanic verbs of "blowing," reaches back to the word *spawn*, from *expandere*. The Protean oscillations between Latinate and Germanic words are mirrored by the shifts across the chapter. Moreover, Stephen hits upon English terms that bastardize or are parasitical of the French: as in the English GOSSOON from *garçon* ("I was a strapping young gossoon at that time"); and LOURDILY ("sluggish, dull, stupid") from *lourd* ("Number one swung loudly her midwife's bag").

An ear for interlinguistic change perhaps motivates the chapter's obsession with the theological concept of transubstantiation as well as Stephen's personal struggle to reconcile his French dandyism and his Irish misery ("Pretending to speak broken English as you dragged your valise, porter threepence, across the slimy pier at Newhaven. *Comment?*")

Thus, language becomes *languid* and the ineluctable yields to the obstinate struggle denoted by *reluctance*.

Under the upswelling tide he
saw the writhing weeds lift
languidly and sway reluctant
arms, hissing up their
petticoats, in whispering
water swaying and upturning
coy silver fronds.

Struggle is Useless.